DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 150 745 EA 010 386

AUTHOR Bondi, Joseph
TITLE Guidelines for Developing and Sustaining Good Middle School Programs.
PUB DATE [Nov 77]
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Middle School Association (Denver, Colorado, November 3-5, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Basic Skills; Curriculum Development; Declining Enrollment; *Educational Improvement; *Guidelines; *Inservice Teacher Education; *Middle Schools; Needs Assessment; Principals; *School Planning

ABSTRACT

Much progress has been made in developing and implementing new programs for pre- and early adolescents, yet there is still much to be done. Perhaps the most important guideline for developing and sustaining good middle school programs is to involve as many persons as possible in the planning process. Other guidelines include setting up objectives and a timetable to accomplish those objectives and providing continuous inservice training. The sustaining of good programs requires competent principals, a staff that is willing to continue its inservice training, and finally an effective communication program with parents, community, and colleagues in other schools within a district. (Author/MLF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED150745

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING GOOD MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAMS

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Joseph Bondi

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

Dr. Joseph Bondi
Professor of Education
Consultant to Middle School Education
The University of South Florida
Tampa, Florida

Introduction

The emergence of the middle school in the United States has represented a dramatic break from the past. Much progress has been made in developing and implementing new programs for pre- and early adolescents, yet there is still much to be done. As with other changes in American education, the middle school has met with varying degrees of understanding and acceptance. Issues have been identified that have continued significance for the middle school movement and they must be addressed. Beginning with the processes involved in developing good middle schools to sustaining good programs once they are developed, we must provide the leadership necessary to insure that the middle school will continue as a positive force in American education.

EA 010 386

Developing Good Middle Schools: Some Guidelines

Many districts are actively engaged in planning or implementing middle school programs. The planning process is critical in determining the success of a middle school. As a consultant to schools and school districts across the country, this writer has been involved in planning and implementing numerous middle school programs. The following guidelines are suggested for those beginning the transition to middle schools:

1. Involve as many individuals as possible within a school or school district in the planning process. Make sure the involvement is both systematic and meaningful. Involve students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community persons from the very beginning.

2. Determine through a needs assesment what the needs are in your school or school district. Start with a thorough study of the children to be served in your middle school(s).

3. Develop a set of objectives to meet the needs you have identified.

4. Identify the responsible agents for carrying out the objectives you have formulated.

5. Set up a reasonable timetable for achieving your objectives.

6. Develop an evaluation design to determine the success of your program. Make sure the evaluation process is continual and that the program is monitored over a three to four year period.

7. Develop inservice training that will include all faculty members and administrators in your middle schools. Effective staff development can be carried out at both the district and school levels but staff development at the school level is more effective.

8. If a consultant is to be utilized, make sure the consultant will stay with you over a two or three year period. Creditability and accountability for consultants result when inservice training is measured over a two-three year period. The program of the middle school should constantly be evolving.

9. Sustain inservice training. New teachers need inservice training each year, but returning teachers also need constant reinforcement.

10. Provide adequate time for inservice training. Many districts are not only scheduling traditional summer workshops, but also providing time during the school year for teachers to participate in inservice training. A promising trend found in school districts is the early dismissal of students several days a month to free teachers for inservice training during the school day.

11. In developing new middle school programs, teachers and administrators should be provided with as much lead-time for planning as possible. A year of planning is preferable to a summer of planning for a middle school.

12. Don't "bite off more than you can chew." If your school is undergoing the transition to a middle school, do the things your faculty can do well the first year. Trying to do too much too soon often results in a disillusioned faculty and the failure of your middle school program. Don't hesitate to continue the planning process during the first year of partial implementation of a middle school program, especially where there has been little lead-time in planning a total program.

Dealing with the Back to the Basics Movement

Middle schools, as other levels of schooling, have been affected by the back to the basics movement. Defining the term "basics" has become a full-time vocation for those concerned with our schools. To many, in a time of economic difficulties, back to the basics simply means cut the budget. To others, concerned with declining test scores, back to the basics means cutting out many programs not directly teaching the three R's. To others, the term has no impact because they never thought they left the basics.

The diverse needs of transescent youngsters dictate a diverse program. "Basics" have to mean not just programs in communication skills and numbers, but programs designed to help youngsters understand the physical changes and social and emotional traumas of transescence. We just simply cannot ignore the psycho-social and physical changes occuring during the middle school years.

Middle school educators often bear the brunt of criticisms leveled by those who want schools to "return to the basics." Special interest classes, exploratory courses, and additional guidance services are often viewed by critics as taking time away from the important task of the school---- teaching basic skills. Orgnizational changes in the middle school such as team teaching, block scheduling, and interdisciplinary instruction are also seen as reducing the amount of instruction in the content areas. Countering the critics, middle school educators point out that middle school youngsters are achieving as well or better in skills areas as those in more traditional school settings. Teachers also point with pride at the statistics indicating reduced number of absences and less discipline referrals found in many middle schools. Other middle schools have surveys indicating students like school and feel better about themselves and others as a result of the program of their middle schools.

What is "basic" in the middle school? Everything that will help youngsters grow into fully functioning individuals.

The Middle School in the K-12 Spectrum

Middle schools, as elementary and high schools, have experienced the rapid growth of enrollment over the last twenty years. That growth has now become a decline in enrollment and this phenomenon is having a pronounced effect on the middle school curriculum. Curriculum development in our schools has in many cases been the adopting of commercial, packaged programs and a "bandaid approach." I.P.I., A.A.A.S., I.S.C.S., and other alphabet programs were adopted wholesale in schools. Although teachers were trained initially in these programs, an easy job market and low salaries resulted in a rapid turnover of teaching staffs. After four or five years, many adopted programs still existed in schools, but only twenty to thirty percent of the faculty originally trained in the programs remained. Teachers in many instance never really felt any ownership in those programs because they never had a hand in developing them.

Working with school faculties and district staffs, I've found in many cases there is little continuity in the content areas. For example, science and social studies programs in many middle schools are a "hodge-podge" of commercial programs, traditional textbook programs, and teacher designed programs. There is not a smooth flow of curriculum from grades to six through eight in most subject areas. Middle schools have few students at grade level in the skills areas of numbers and communication.

Declining enrollments and less turnover in faculties are giving us some "breathing room" and we are now beginning to review and update courses of study. Curriculum committees are being organized in subject areas and we see teachers revising curricular areas to fit the needs of emerging adolescent learners. Where there are gaps or overlaps in subject areas, teachers are developing articulated programs. Broad topics that can be related and interrelated are being developed and providing the bases of real inter-disciplinary teaching. Teachers are communicating within grade levels, across grade levels, and across disciplines. Most important in this exciting process of revising curriculum is the positive attitude of teachers toward a curriculum <u>they</u> have developed. Even though teachers are still utilizing commercially designed programs, they are using those programs as a part of a larger teacher designed curriculum. Excellent science, social studies, art, music, physical education, industrial arts, and other programs have been developed. Skills continuums (K-8) in mathematics and language arts are in use and we are implementing excellent programs in many middle schools. Rather than relying on mechanistic approaches to teaching skills, approaches that often leave out teacher and student interaction, teachers are developing humanistic approaches to teaching skills. Basic skills are being taught in middle schools and those skills include skills of critical thinking and organizing and interpreting information.

For the first time in twenty-five years we are seeing a meaningful curriculum developed for the middle grades. Middle schools will affect other levels in the K-12 spectrum. Curriculum articulation K-12, not just 6-8 will result and that indeed will be a positive change in American education.

Developing Competent Principals for the Middle School

In a flight back from Philadelphia one night after both of us had addressed the Delaware Secondary School Administrators, Bill Alexander, the father of the middle school movement, turned to me and asked what I thought was the most important key to the success of the middle school movement. My response was competent middle school principals. Dr. Alexander agreed.

What do we mean by competent middle school principals? Competent means many things. First, a middle school principal has to understand and love the age group found in the middle grades. Second, he or she has to be an instructional leader and not just a manager. The middle school principal has to understand organizational structures such as teaming, interdisciplinary teaching, flexible scheduling, and block scheduling, and be able to develop those organizational patterns in his school. He or she has to be creative, dynamic, and communicate well with kids, parents, and teachers alike. Last, the middle school principal has to be strong enough to stand up in the system when the middle school comes under attack from those who don't understand it. A strong middle school leader will be able to communicate with the elementary and high school administrators and work towards an articulated K-12 curriculum. He or she must not see the middle school as an isolated structure, but as part of a total system of education.

Where are these administrators trained? In very few places. Our universities and school districts need to get busy to train good middle school principals. A promising trend in many school districts is the implementation at the school level of curriculum assistants who hold administrative lines, but work directly with teachers in the classroom. Many of these individuals are advancing into principalships and we're experiencing good results from such appointments. Perhaps we'll see the day when we can eliminate Deans of Boys or Girls and Assistant Principals in charge of discipline. How much more productive we could be at the middle school if we could convert those administrative lines into additional guidance and curriculum positions.

Competent middle school principals are indeed a key element in the success of the middle school movement. School districts should develop special programs for identifying promising middle school administrators and provide them with inservice training necessary to work emerging adolescent learners.

Maintaining Continuous Inservice Training for Teachers

A major problem in the middle school movement has been the lack of sustained inservice training for teachers. Too often, we see a marked decline in the quality of middle school programs because a faculty originally trained for the middle school fails to have follow-up inservice training. Also, new teachers coming into middle schools are not provided with the training the original faculty had during their first year. Unless there is a consistent inservice training for teachers, the middle school will suffer the same fate at the junior high school.

Many school districts are setting up teacher renewal centers where inservice training for new and old teachers is offered on a continued basis throughout the year. Such programs lead to an increased interest in the middle school and help sustain and improve existing middle school programs.

It is unfortunate, but the elementary-secondary syndrome has prevailed in colleges of education. As was the case with the junior high school, very few universities are providing special undergraduate training programs for middle school teachers. Consequently, the major emphasis in the years ahead will continue to be inservice training. Declining enrollments and a tight job market have leveled off the constant turnover of teachers. As a result, we are finding experienced teachers teaching for longer periods of time in our middle schools. Our focus then in the future will be the upgrading of present staffs. The renewal center concept for constant inservice training offers an attractive alternative to the "hit and miss" system of college courses or isolated workshops.

Sustaining Middle Schools - Preventing a Regeression to the Junior High School

Middle schools have grown in number in the United States and have resulted in positive changes in American education. Many middle schools in the sixties and seventies resulted from changing enrollment patterns, integration efforts, and a "bandwagon" effect. Many of us saw the wrong reasons for establishing middle schools, but the right opportunities to improve school programs for an age group long ignored in our schools. Declining enrollments, limited budgets, and lack of sustained inservice training are now resulting in school boards, school administrators, and teachers in some districts re-examining middle school structures. These developments are encouraging those really not committed to the education of transescents to suggest the easy way out of returning to the junior high school.

We now have increased data indicating the critical need for school programs designed to meet the needs of pre- and emerging adolescent learners. We are experiencing a social phenomenon where the family life is steadily eroding. In Florida for example, for every one hundred marriages last year, there were sixty-six divorces. That statistic is especially startling when a recent survey of values of three thousand middle school youngsters (grades six-eight) in that state indicated the number on value of those youngsters was family security. Family security was defined as "two parents at home who care about me and a secure home where there is no fighting."

At a time in the history of our society where family structure is breaking down and youngsters more than ever need the kind of guidance and personal development activities a middle school can provide, we find some who say let's return to the impersonal grades seven-nine junior or imitation high school. We only have to be reminded that the junior high school had fifty years to prove itself and didn't because it offered a program designed more for adolescents rather than to youngsters in transescence.

Sustaining middle schools means we must go back and re-examine some of our existing middle school programs. Our faculties need to re-study the nature of the age group they are serving and re-establish the philosophy of the middle school. New inservice training programs must be established to help new and old teachers cope with the problem of today's middle school youngsters.

Those committed to the middle school program must set up an effective communications network to convince the public and colleagues that the middle school is still the best alternative to the junior high school. The middle school has been a positive change in American education and we must not let it fail.